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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 000653

SENSITIVE
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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/RPM AND EUR/CE

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TAGS: AF EZ MARR PREL MASS
SUBJECT: CZECH REPUBLIC: GOVERNMENT APPROVES MINISTRY OF
DEFENSE'S 2009 FOREIGN DEPLOYMENTS PLAN

REF: PRAGUE 606

Classified By: Acting Political/Economic Counselor Martina Strong for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d).

1.(SBU) Summary: The Czech government approved the Ministry of Defense's (MOD) 2009 Foreign Deployment Plan at its October 1 cabinet session. Under the draft plan, the total number of Czech troops deployed abroad in 2009 would increase from approximately 900 to just over 1380, not including commitments to the EU Battle Group (EUBG) or the NATO Rapid Reaction Force (NRF). In 2009, the Czechs propose having approximately 745 troops in Afghanistan, up from this year's 5495. Due to a deteriorating security situation, the MOD plans to increase from around 200 to 330 the soldiers stationed at the Logar PRT. In Kosovo, the Czechs will have up to 550 troops. The Czech Air Force will also guard the airspace of the Baltic States from May to August 2009. In Iraq, the Czechs will only keep five instructors under the NATO training mission and will withdraw their recently deployed training team assigned under Multi-National Forces Iraq (MNF-I). The total cost of these deployments is expected to be 2.5 billion crowns, (USD 145.8 million). The deployments bill must now be approved by the parliament. The proposed increase of Czech troops in Afghanistan has already generated questions from across the political spectrum, raising doubts about the deployments bill's prospects in the Czech parliament. End Summary.

Afghanistan

2.(SBU) The Czech government continues to place a high priority on foreign military deployments to Afghanistan. Overall, the Czechs plan to have 645 troops assigned under ISAF control and up to 100 Czech SOF soldiers operating under Operation Enduring Freedom. Due to a worsening security situation in the Logar province and to enable the 10 MFA reconstruction experts assigned to the PRT to work more effectively, the Czech MOD plans to send approximately 130 additional troops to the Logar Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). The deployment plan also includes 80 troops to help guard the Dutch PRT in Uruzgan Province for the first half of the year. At the Kabul airport, the Czechs will maintain a contingent of 70 soldiers, including chemical defense experts, air force specialists, and an Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT) to help train pilots for the helicopters that the Czechs donated to Afghanistan in 2007. The MOD additionally plans to send 120 soldiers to support the 3 Mi-17s helicopters to be assigned into the Regional Command East (RC-East) area of responsibility (AOR). During the first half of 2009, the Czechs will send a detachment consisting of two Arthur radars and 45 support personnel to

Kandahar airfield. Finally, the 100 members of the 601 Special Forces Group will continue their operations under Operation Enduring Freedom.

NATO Rapid Reaction Force and Defense of Baltic Airspace

3.(SBU) During the first half of 2009, the Czechs will offer 229 soldiers to be a part of the NATO Rapid Reaction Force (NRF). These soldiers will include a passive surveillance system, a decontamination unit, a chemical laboratory, and a bio detection team. In the second half of 2009, the Czechs will provide three experts on defenses against weapons of mass destruction to the NRF. The government's plan includes sending four Czech Air Force Gripen fighters and 75 personnel to Lithuania to help guard the airspace of the three Baltic States from May to August 2009. Note: The Czechs have been planning this rotation since early 2006. End Note.

EU Battle Group, Iraq, Kosovo, Chad, and the Sinai

4.(SBU) The Czechs will have up to 1800 troops available for the joint Czech-Slovak EU battle group. Per reftel, the Czechs are planning to remove their approximately 15 armor trainers under MNF-I from Taji, Iraq, by the end of 2009. They will continue to have 5 soldiers as part of the NATO training mission in Baghdad. In Kosovo, the Government proposes sending 430 troops, with another 120 on stand-by in the Czech Republic in case of an emergency. The MOD also proposes keeping 3 people as part of the French-led EUFOR mission in Chad and the Central African Republic. For 2009, the Czechs for the first time will recommend sending 3 soldiers to be part of the multi-national observer force in the Sinai.

5.(C) Comment: The Czechs have proposed an ambitious 2009 Foreign Deployments plan. However, the defense budget has not kept pace with training and equipment needs required for the increased deployment tempo. The government's draft 2009 budget allocates 55 billion crowns (approximately USD 3.3 billion) to the Ministry of Defense (MOD), up from 54 billion crowns in 2008, a net decline in real terms, considering the government's projected inflation rate of around 3 percent. Defense spending as a percentage of GDP will also drop from 1.43 percent in 2008 to 1.39 percent in 2009. Note: Deployment costs are paid out of a separate authorization outside of the regular defense budget. End note. If this downward trend and higher deployment commitments continue, the Czech military's ability to train and equip for additional deployments and modernize equipment could be undermined.

6.(C) Comment Continued: The Czech government also faces political problems with its 2009 deployment plans. Opposition Social Democrats (CSSD), along with the Communists who traditionally oppose all deployments, have publicly stated their opposition to the government's proposal. Second, CSSD is unlikely to play a constructive role this year due to the tense political atmosphere and the upcoming contentious votes on the missile defense agreements, the 2009 budget, and other reform efforts. Third, the increase in security forces for Afghanistan is a major new and controversial commitment that will receive considerable scrutiny, especially in light of the recent attacks and casualties in Logar. Fourth, the Government's plan is not popular among the public. Over 70% of Czechs are against sending additional troops to Afghanistan and 56% are against sending any soldiers abroad. Finally, the MFA and parliamentary sources have told us that the MOD has made some strategic mistakes in selling the deployments proposal politically. Defense Minister Parkanova (KDU-CSL) did not discuss the draft plan with her coalition partners or any CSSD leaders before presenting it to the government. In the end, we expect the vote to be extremely close, but believe that the MOD's plan with some possible adjustments in troop levels will be approved. To help the Czech Government gain the necessary parliamentary support, USG officials should use all opportunities to express appreciation of Czech foreign deployments and support for

continued strong Czech engagement. End Comment.
Graber